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SOCIAL PROGRESS AND THE PURPOSEFUL UTILIZATION OF THE SURPLUS

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There are certain fundamental factors of social progress whose relation one to another and whose modes of operation are by no means so well determined as to preclude further discussion. Pressure, surplus, purposeful action, and crisis concern us here.

Progress is frequently assumed to be the result of pressure exerted upon a social group by untoward conditions such as poverty, lack, calamity, or necessity of any sort; and to this assumption much foundation has been given by economic science. Ever since Thomas Malthus attributed improvement to the vice and misery arising from the tendency of the population to press ahead of the means of subsistence, the theory of pressure as a factor in progress has played an important rôle in our thinking. But an opposing theory maintains that progress is due to a surplus, to the energy that abundance gives. The latter theory has found verification in biology, and apparently holds good in society as being more true to the facts than the former. For if there remains no energy unconsumed in the struggle for existence, if it is just possible to live and nothing more, the possibility of any change at all for the better is out of the question. There must be an overplus of energy available, a margin unused in the struggle, if any organism or any social group is to be more than static. However, this does not mean that the rôle of pressure is excluded from the process of change nor even from progress itself; but only that without some surplus the pressure cannot operate beneficially at all. Given a modicum of surplus energy sufficient for pressure of any sort to play upon without bringing existence itself to an end, there will result such emotional disturbances in an organism and such crises in a social group as may lead to new adaptations or adjustments of an advantageous nature. In the case of society, the change to

another environment or a change of the existing environment may be the result. The fact that the pressure thus operating is commonly observed, rather than the energy back of it upon which it plays, makes plausible the theory that progress is due primarily to pressure instead of surplus. While in human society progressive change often comes as indicated through the play of pressure upon a group with a surplus, in advanced societies it may and usually does come without it from that conscious and purposeful directing of marginal energy of which such societies are capable.

The purposeful utilization of its surplus by any society is a matter of vital importance, for energy may be directed to social advance or it may be dissipated to no good end. How it is being used by present-day society in America is a question that has received and still merits consideration. But before attempting to arrive at the answer, let us take an inventory of the social surplus itself.

Scientists are pretty generally agreed that the amount of energy in society is limited; that at any given time there exists only a definite fund of it that can be expended in effort. However, it is not merely a definite amount such as an organism has at its disposal, for social energy is more than the total energy of the human organisms that compose society. There is, in addition, energy stored up in the form of knowledge, achievement, and accumulated wealth. "The force accumulated through personal effort in training, education, and discipline is similar to capital" says G. T. Fairchild. These forces represent effort; and the superiority of one society over another is reckoned very largely in terms of such forces. The organic energy of an African tribe may equal or exceed that of an American community of like size, but the social energy of the latter is far greater on account of the extra-organic store it commands. Professor J. M. Gillette has estimated that production "consumes some 95 per cent of the energy at the disposal of collective man." He has reached this interesting conclusion on the basis of the numbers employed in the various occupational groups in the United States. It is a meaningless and erroneous deduction, because only organic energy is considered. But even if this figure had any real significance, it would not help

much in determining the amount of social surplus. We certainly should not be justified in inferring that the surplus was only the remaining 5 per cent of the collective energy, since clearly not all of the productive effort exerted is demanded for mere existence nor even for comfortable existence. A considerable share of it is supererogatory. This means a surplus, both organic and otherwise; how great cannot be said. There is no real measure of this quantity; there is not even any means of approximating it. We can, therefore, speak only in crude generalities based on common observation. Yet even such observation leaves the impression that our surplus is enormous, that we are indeed living under what Professor Patten has so aptly termed "a pleasure or surplus economy" in contradistinction to a "pain or a deficit economy."

Consider our society by classes from the top well down into the lower strata, and everywhere there is evidence that surplus energy abounds. The wealthy class has tens of millions in money, much talent, and much leisure. It is estimated that forty-four families possess incomes that amount in the aggregate to at least fifty millions per year. The middle class is endowed with fortunes. For instance, it has been estimated by a rather careful manufacturer that there are not less than one million families in the United States that can afford automobiles. This number, moreover, includes only those whose incomes range from \$3,000 to \$60,000 per annum. As a matter of fact, 600,000 people bought some 703,000 automobiles at the price of \$500,000,000 in 1915. On January 1, 1916, nearly two million automobiles were registered. These figures probably give a much fairer index to the surplus wealth of the middle class than do those of the personal incomes compiled by the Commissioner of Internal Revenue on the basis of the federal income tax. The first published report of the Commissioner indicates that 352,384 persons have incomes ranging from \$2,500 to \$50,000, and that 5,214 persons have incomes above the latter amount. The report for the year ending June 30, 1915, gave the total amount as \$41,046,162. The number of persons paying this tax was 357,515, and of these 210,202 had incomes ranging from \$2,500 to \$5,000. W. I. King attempts to estimate our annual capital savings or "national dividend," and for the year

1910 puts it at \$2,000,000,000. Though this is only a rough guess, it is as nearly accurate as any yet made of the extent to which surplus wealth is accumulating.

The developed talent also of the middle class, which is not, of course, exhausted in bread-winning, is almost immeasurable. In addition, the amount of leisure, despite the much emphasized strenuousness of the times in the commercial world, is very large. Labor-saving devices in our industries, business, and homes, quick means of communication, and rapid transportation are in virtually every walk of life continually adding to the store of leisure either actually or potentially. By this development and other tendencies of the age, the women of the middle class, in addition to those of the upper, have become in a large measure a leisure class. Before the industrial era was so far advanced, the burdens of the household fully consumed woman's time. The preparation of foods and clothing from the raw materials was a task never finished. But under the present order foods of every kind are brought into the house ready to eat, and garments are purchased ready to wear. The household arts of curing, preserving, spinning, weaving, knitting, sewing, and, in a measure, even laundrying and cooking have passed out. This is true of the town and in only a slighter degree of the country. Nothing has come to take the place of these arts. Moreover, the modern house, or the house of the modern day, requires less labor to keep than did the house of days gone by. It is not overstating the facts to say that woman's task is now easy and her burden light. In addition, fewer children are being born and reared. The number is not half that of a generation ago. There has consequently been a great piling up of leisure in woman's sphere. It has become so abundant that it palls upon multitudes. Among the laboring class, of course, surplusage of any kind is found to be greatly curtailed; yet it is not altogether eliminated. In the better-skilled and more organized trades there is a fair margin of time not employed in bread-winning and at the laborer's disposal. The well-organized and well-paid workers, at least, have a surplus of energy in this form, if not in the form of wealth or developed talent. When it is all totaled, there is a vast amount of surplus energy in America; and it is being continually augmented.

Compared with societies such as China and India afford, where energy is consumed in the struggle of a teeming population to live and reproduce itself till the marginal surplus is kept at a minimum, our society has marvelous possibilities of advancement before it. But the mere fact that an enormous social surplus exists is no guaranty that social progress is taking place. All depends upon the use to which it is being put. Let us then turn to the question raised above, How is the marginal energy being employed?

Normally, according to cosmic laws, all energy flows in channels of least resistance or greatest traction or the resultant of the two. The animal's surplus is therefore expended in play, and out of the abundance of a social group spontaneous activities of a pleasurable nature arise. Even purposive employment of surplusage in human society tends to conform to the cosmic law. Consequently, accumulated wealth is directed, as we should naturally expect, very largely to the gratification of pleasurable instincts. Very much of it is consumed in satisfying the appetite, the desire for luxury, and the taste for futile display. It is said that at least fifteen millions of dollars are spent in New York alone for New Year's dinners. Some headlines from the dailies showing into what courses money flows were recently exhibited in a current periodical. They run in the following vein: "Gilded Room for Toy Spaniel at Waldorf-Astoria"; "Baroness' Dog Wears Ruby"; "Mrs. S., of New York, Loses \$15,000 Muff"; "Ex-Senator Buys \$120,000 Dinner Set for \$7,000,000 Home"; "\$250,000 Tennis Building Opens in New York"; "Half-Million in Gems on Mrs. L. at Ball"; "Countess Spends \$50,000 to Have German Emperor One Day." Thus it is evident that fortunes are lavished on social functions. And just as freely are they spent for the "purchase of the past," to buy its broken urns and statues, musty scrolls and manuscripts, rotten tapestries and grimy pictures, rusty armor and bent sabers, unstrung lutes and broken pillars, decaying mummies and their desecrated tombs. One has only to consult again the headlines for proof of this: "\$28,000 for a Salt Cellar at Christie's"; "\$42,800 for a Book at Hoe Sale"; "\$28,000 for Eight Chairs"; "\$80,000 for a Helmet"; "\$14,000 for an Antique Soup Plate,"; "\$500,000 for a Picture"; millions upon millions for this

junk of the past, multimillions for art collections, for the trappings of fallen nobility, for the faded glamors and sullied lusters of heraldic creations, for ancient castles, for everything that is musty with age or classed with art. There is absolutely no way of telling what incalculable sums of the surplus wealth are annually locked up in these things. Nor does this reckoning take account of all. It is estimated that in normal times two hundred millions are spent annually by Americans in globe-trotting. What hoards are squandered on amusements no one can say. But into this last channel a constant stream of surplus flows from the upper and middle reaches of society, until the stream rolls down like a flood over the plains of life. Besides, lavish gifts are devoted, generally with good intent, to charity, missions, endowments, and other benefactions. Three hundred millions, chiefly from American coffers, is reported to have been the aggregate amount of public benevolence for 1914. Of this something like thirty millions went to religious missionary enterprises alone. The benefactions of two American billionaires in recent years are put by themselves at a figure exceeding five hundred and seventy-five millions of dollars. Above all this, wealth that no one can begin to estimate is sequestered from any social use at all by those who possess it. Professor C. H. Cooley has summed up the situation very well in the following:

While there are some cheerful givers on a large scale among us and many on a small one, I am not sure that there was ever, on the whole, a commercial society that contributed a smaller part of its gains to general causes. We have done much in this way; but then we are enormously rich; and the most that has been done has been done by taxation, which falls most heavily upon small property owners. The more communal use of wealth is rather a matter of general probability and of faith in democratic sentiment, than of demonstrable fact.

The surplus energy represented by leisure is enormous in amount but what of its utilization? Much is expended in mere slothfulness, and more on the empty rounds of futile amusements. In this way especially the women of the upper and middle classes dispose of it. The leisure of the men of these classes is employed to a considerable extent in the effort to increase their surplus wealth. What remains is directed to the pursuit of fads and pleasures. The leisure surplus of the laboring classes is not large, but it is put to

fairly creditable use. Apart from the time given to recreation, this class consumes much of its time in self-improvement. A study was recently made of a typical group of about a thousand working men in New York to determine how they use their spare time. It was found, as one might suppose, that the longer the working day, the greater the percentage of available leisure spent for recreation. It was discovered, also, that those having shorter hours for work, i.e., eight to nine and nine to ten, spent a greater percentage of the leisure allotted them in seeking to improve their minds. The agencies of which they availed themselves for this purpose were public lectures, libraries, private study, night schools, magazines, books, and newspapers. Arranged by hour groups, according to the percentage of choices of these agencies out of the total choices for expenditure of leisure, the figures in Table I are extracted from the data of the study.

TABLE I

8 to 9 Hours	9 to 10 Hours	10 to 11 Hours	11 Hours and Over
30.6 per cent	31 per cent	28 per cent	24.8 per cent

Arranged again in like manner with respect to the percentage of spare time in each week that was devoted to educational matters, Table II is compiled from the data furnished by the study.

TABLE II

8 to 9 Hours	9 to 10 Hours	10 to 11 Hours	11 Hours and Over
26.2 per cent	26.3 per cent	23.2 per cent	21.8 per cent

The author of the investigation says that the shorter-hour groups considered reading the most profitable expenditure of spare time, while the longer-hour groups put "staying at home" first. From the facts revealed by this study, if they be reliable and really typical, it is clear that the laboring classes are making good use of such surplus leisure as remains over and above that which must be expended in necessary rest and recreation. They are utilizing it for their own mental and social development.

If, then, the foregoing analysis be fair, and if it at all approximate the truth, it is not evident that the channels in which surplus energy is naturally flowing are those that lead to social advancement. Giving full credit to that part of wealth, leisure, and talent which is purposely dedicated to the ends of progress, we must admit that it is, after all, but a small portion of the whole surplus. The wealth that is devoted to the advancement of education, research, and discovery is in the main well employed, but not even all of this really contributes to social betterment. Except for the fact that useful information is often a by-product of the best-directed charitable endeavors, the large sums laid out in benevolence do not get us far, since little or nothing fundamental is aimed at or achieved. Society is made but little better, and ultimate democracy is brought no nearer by the mere financing of charities that, perpetuating the underlying causes of poverty, create the necessity for their existence. What fields for social experimentation lie open to wealth, if wealth would but enter them! It might subsidize new ventures in industry and husbandry, such as co-operative management, profit sharing, better wage-paying enterprises, etc. It might establish laboratories of various kinds to test theories. It might finance new schemes of municipal and state government and taxation in the same. It might make possible accurate knowledge on many social and economic problems and disseminate the information gathered. It might make possible useful propagandas for the elimination of disease, for the breeding of better men, and for scores of other things. In a word, it might seek out the ways and means of democratic progress. But as a matter of fact, the wealth surplus in the main avoids such channels. Likewise does the leisure surplus. There is, to be sure, an effort to utilize it wisely on the part of the women who are engaged in the feminist movement. This is good, for it is operating to the advancement of democracy. Labor too, as we have seen, is devoting a fair share of its leisure surplus to its own improvement; and this also is good. But the leisure of the great majority is little utilized for their own development or for any object that furthers the social well-being. A corrective example for our consideration may be cited in the citizens of ancient Greece. Those having leisure as a rule gave attention to art, literature,

philosophy, and statesmanship. They sought self-improvement and through it social betterment. Our leisure is reabsorbed in most instances to economic profit or to no profit at all. The average American spends little or none of his time or money or talent in seeking a broad and intelligent outlook upon the social world of which he is a part. Someone very aptly said of the last Congress and the people it represented that the majority "are enjoying that immunity from mental action, that separation from intellectual effort, and that absence of brain-filling which makes life, after all, just what it is, in Congress as well as out." E. L. Godken has pointedly remarked:

The number of persons who have something to say about political affairs has increased a thousand fold, but the practice of reading books has not increased, and it is in books that experience is recorded. In the past the governing class, in part at least, was a reading class. One of the reasons which are generally said to have given the Southern members special influence in Congress before the war is that they read books, had libraries, and had wide knowledge of the experiments tried by earlier generations of mankind. Their successors rarely read anything but the newspapers. . . . In fact, I may venture the assertion that the influence of history on politics was never smaller than it is today, although history was never before cultivated with so much acumen and industry. So that authority and experience may fairly be ruled out of the list of forces which seriously influence the government of democratic societies. In the formation of public opinion they do not greatly count.

Enjoying ignorance and being unwilling to invest anything of his accumulated surplus for a deeper comprehension of things as they are and for a knowledge of how to make them better, the middle-class American withholds from progress its rightful due. At least he does not strive to meet the demands of a "pleasure or surplus economy," which Professor Patton says are "to utilize the surplus for common good, not to undermine energy and productive ability or create parasitic classes, but to distribute the surplus in ways that will promote general welfare and secure better preparation for the future."

Not that progress in many lines is by any means wanting, especially in technical, mechanical, industrial, and scientific spheres. But real social progress, which the people of the western world associate directly or indirectly with the furtherance of democracy,

is not commensurate with that achieved in other realms. The present utilization of the social surplus is not conducive to the promoting of democracy. It is not so much positively as negatively anti-democratic in its effects. For when devoted to other ends, whether good, bad, or indifferent, the surplus is not available for anything else. It cannot be applied to movements of a democratic nature; and the other ends to which it is directed are inclined to foster undemocratic conditions.

There are numerous ways of social advance. Until trial is made, no one can say whither they will lead, and until more of our social surplus is focused upon them, they will remain untried, and the democratization of society will continue unrealized.

When the purposeful direction of social surplus fails to promote it, progress may come through the pressure of critical conditions which serve to turn the energy into new channels. Crises often bring this about. A typical instance of their operation may be cited in the experience of a certain rural village. A crisis was precipitated by the proposed removal of its leading institution and the necessity of competing for a projected railway with a rival community. The loss of the institution would clearly mean cutting off of incomes, reduction of wages, curtailment of business, depreciation of property values, and loss of community prestige. But in order to keep the institution a large amount of accumulate wealth would have to be given up by the community as a whole. The projected railway promised many advantages either to this town or to its rival, with a corresponding handicap to the loser in the contest. It asked, however, in return for its benefits large subsidies from the wealth of the chosen village. The pressure was so great and the exigencies of the situation so imperative that the community yielded up its surplus to meet the demands. This new utilization of its energy under pressure led to a further purposive direction of its surplus into new channels. A radical program of public improvement was immediately inaugurated. Once started, it has gone on from stage to stage gathering momentum as it has advanced.

What is found true of a single community often holds good of a society as a whole. In its life crises not infrequently bring about

progress by causing a redirection of energy. Such calamities as fire, drought, flood, plague, and war may turn the streams of power into new courses. Many a burned or shattered city has fallen ingloriously in heaps of brick to rise magnificently in piles of marble to honor its age. The Black Death of 1349, which left Europe weak and impoverished, greatly affected the status of the working classes. It gave rise to a long series of legal enactments aiming to reattach the laborers to the soil. The Thirty Years' War was followed by the freeing of the serfs throughout Europe. Our Civil War gave rise to unprecedented mechanical invention. During that period were patented those machines which have given America such prestige in the agricultural world. After the Napoleonic wars the democratic movement began in England. Brought to the verge of ruin by the disastrous war of 1864, Denmark had to seek a new course. Co-operative action in agriculture, unequalled anywhere, was the result. These changes just enumerated were all correlated with crises. The two things seem related as cause and effect on the principle under consideration. The present European war is beginning to turn the social surplusage to new enterprises and causes, industrial, political, moral, and intellectual. If the belligerents are not completely exhausted and the surplus of every kind not wholly consumed at the end of the conflict, radical changes will follow in the several countries concerned, new ways will be discovered in many fields, and an era of progress will probably be entered upon.

This redirection of energy following upon crises is due to the stimulating effect that is produced by a limited curtailment of the surplus.

Of course we are not forgetting that crises cause change only—merely redirection, not necessarily progressive change. Retrogressive movements often result from them. Sometimes, when too severe, they leave little or no energy above what is actually required for existence; then there is stagnation.

Although we are not here concerned with the origin of crises, it may be pointed out incidentally that areas of unequal social surplus and of unlike usage of the same can give rise to them. For a situation then obtains not unlike that in the physical atmosphere

when unequal-pressure areas produce storms. If certain classes consume vast stores of wealth, talent, and leisure futilely and foolishly, and reabsorb their surplus for themselves alone, while other classes employ their meager supply for the enhancement of ability and for the acquisition of knowledge directed toward social advancement, crises are in preparation. The existence of such inharmonious areas in present-day society is evident. Where the surplusage is large and employed without respect to the present or future good of the group as a group, there is a static or low-pressure area. Where the surplus is small and consciously put to good use, there is a dynamic or high-pressure area. If now two such areas reach a state where the differential becomes too great, a storm follows till the pressure is equalized; or, in other words, till energy is turned into new courses. The American Civil War was thus precipitated. The North and the South were areas of unequal surplus differently utilized. The stress became too great, and conflict followed. The French Revolution came about in the same way. Crises of greater or less moment are, on the grounds pointed out, always gathering. Storms may break at any time. In fact, they are of frequent occurrence on a small scale in the form of strikes, riots, and raids of unemployed groups and of clashes between reform and reactionary classes. These are just little eddying gusts, but they may grow until whole sections of society are swept into the whirlwind of revolutions.

These little crises should serve to call attention to the need of a different utilization of the social surplus in much of our society. Total and future interests must prevail over class, individual, and present interests. Social equalization must take place, if not in a purposeful manner, then by the operation of the law of crises; and the "fierce beating of blind rebellion against blind obstruction" come into play. It may be, however, that these little crises will so continually stir the static areas of our social life that the undemocratic utilization of surplus energy will be transmuted into an employment of the same for progressive purposes; and thus will great crises be avoided. In fact, there is evidence that this is precisely what they are doing, to the end that the making of ultimate democracy is not wholly thwarted.